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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5448  
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3114  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4138  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 8778  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1529  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0959  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000637

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DEPT FOR NEA/MAG, IO; GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [MO](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: BASTAGLI MAKES THE CASE FOR  
MINURSO

REF: A. RABAT 561

[1](#)B. RABAT 552

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During an April 6 meeting with the Ambassador, SRSB Bastagli argued that tighter and more robust operations over the last six months had made MINURSO a more effective force. Violations of the ceasefire were down 50 percent. Confidence-building measures remained essential to UN operations in Western Sahara, and the UN hoped they could be expanded, as they help hold Sahrawi society together. Bastagli said the UN was neglecting the Sahrawis by not offering any programs west of the berm and not focusing on the needs of the Sahrawi population, beyond the political solution. Both Ambassador and Bastagli expressed disappointment in Morocco's apparent decision to delay submitting ideas on autonomy, after indications to the contrary. Bastagli said Morocco had postponed again the proposed visit of the UN Human Rights Commission. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) SRSB Francesco Bastagli met with Ambassador Riley (their first meeting) for 45 minutes on April 6. Bastagli was accompanied by MINURSO Political Officer Carmen Johns, while DCM and Polcouns joined the Ambassador. Bastagli said his staff had just completed its portion of the draft report to the UNSYG. Reviewing the last six months of activity, Bastagli said MINURSO had made positive accomplishments in line with its mandate. MINURSO operations were more effective and stream-lined. MINURSO had merged civilian and military communications to consolidate and save money. Night patrols and demining activities were going on. The family visits under the confidence-building measures (CBMs) had resumed after a lapse of a year; while run by UNHCR, MINURSO was heavily involved. As he had relayed during a recent meeting in Geneva, MINURSO wanted to build on the successes of the program and expand. Illegal migration remained a big issue in the Western Sahara, and MINURSO had recently worked out an understanding with IOM and UNHCR on how to handle migrants.

[1](#)3. (C) Thus, Bastagli continued, the UNSYG's report on Western Sahara would show progress. On the military side, tighter operations were producing results. Violations of the ceasefire by both sides were down 50 percent from the

previous "semester" (comment: it was not clear what time period a semester represents), with a rise during the King's visit to Laayoune (see Ref A).

CBMs

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14. (C) Turning to the CBMs in more detail, Bastagli said the CBMs were important both to the UN and the people in the Western Sahara. They brought separated communities together. There was a waiting list of 18,000 people for the family visits program, which at current rates constituted a backlog of 7-8 years. The UN hoped to expand the pace of moving 180 people a month, but concurrence by the GOM and GOA was necessary before the program could expand. Roughly 11,000 of the backlog were registrants from Tindouf. Bastagli said he had discussed the issue with the new Minister of Interior and the MFA during his current trip to Rabat. Both sides fiddle with the program, he said; on a recent flight departing Laayoune, the Moroccans had pulled 10 people out at the last minute because they were "activists." (Comment: we understand that prominent Sahrawi activist Mohammed Daddach is eager to participate in the program, in part to visit his sick mother in Tindouf, but the GOM allegedly will not let him go, Daddach supporters say.) The CBM program needed more management from the UN, Bastagli said -- someone with authority and charisma needs to run the program to counteract the manipulation from the two sides and keep everything on track. UNHCR "rolls with the punches" too easily, Bastagli claimed.

15. (C) Bastagli said the non-political seminars were still under consideration as a CBM. They too could provide the occasion for direct encounters between Sahrawis separated by

the berm. Topics such as Hassaniya poetry and nomadic life in a changing world were some of the ideas under consideration. The UN envisioned that the seminars would take place outside but close to the Western Sahara, such as in the Canary Islands. UNHCR had developed the concept and was close to tabling it with the parties.

16. (C) Ambassador asked what drove the interest in the CBMs among the Sahrawis. The Moroccans, it seemed, had hoped more Sahrawis from Tindouf would stay west of the berm, and they may have been disappointed this did not take place. (Johns chimed in that only seven Sahrawis had decided to stay on the Moroccan side). Bastagli agreed the GOM hoped for this result. While acknowledging that "going native" was a concern of his about UN staff posted in Tindouf, Bastagli said Tindouf residents were generally strong believers "in the cause" of independence. It was difficult to judge the extent of coercion in Tindouf, but UN staffers there did not believe the refugees were physically captive. A disincentive to people in Tindouf was the heavy hand on the Sahrawi population on the Moroccan side.

17. (C) Ambassador asked whether, while the US continued to support the CBMs, the CBMs contributed to a political solution to the conflict. Bastagli said the CBMs give the people a perspective on life on the other side, which is important. There is paranoia, and there are misconceptions on both sides. And, if nothing else, from a humanitarian point of view, the exchanges help hold the society together, Bastagli argued.

The UN is Neglecting the Sahrawis

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18. (C) Bastagli turned to a larger issue, that of "UN neglect" of the Sahrawi people. He said there is a gap in knowledge, a missing link, about the inhabitants of the Moroccan side of the berm. There are no UN agencies, other than MINURSO and UNHCR, operating in the Sahara. The UN, and by extension the international community, knows little about the status of health and education in the Sahara. What are the challenges, beyond the political, are the people facing? The problem is not MINURSO, Bastagli said, but one of UN

management. The UNSYG's report, for example, should contain a section assessing the conditions of the people.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador noted that major initiatives such as the Free Trade Agreement and the Millennium Challenge Account excluded the Western Sahara, which was understandable from a political point of view but unfortunate as the people of the Sahara could not thus benefit from such initiatives.

Autonomy: We Expect More  
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¶10. (C) Noting that he had expected "more" from the Moroccans in the way of autonomy at this stage, Bastagli asked for the Ambassador's views on the way ahead. Bastagli noted that he was unsure what UN Personal Envoy Van Walsum would contribute to the upcoming report on this issue, but it would probably amount more to process than substance. The Ambassador responded that Morocco seemed to "veer off course" with recent indications that it would delay submission of its autonomy plan. He had asked questions of the GOM about the composition of CORCAS: how were the members selected? why would their first meeting be in Rabat (Ref B)? Ambassador related that he was making calls on the heads of major Moroccan political parties, most of whom were seeking US support for Morocco's ideas on autonomy. What ideas on autonomy? the ambassador asked rhetorically. Frankly the US was disappointed and did not believe this was a constructive way to go forward.

¶11. (C) Bastagli said he was distressed as well. The "elected" members of CORCAS seemed to be simply hand-picked members from the original elected committee members. Some were members of other bodies that already existed. It was clear that the GOM would provide nothing concrete on autonomy in April, as it had suggested. Bastagli said he had met earlier with the UK Ambassador, who told him that in London

Deputy FM Fassi Fihri and UN Perm Rep Sahel had asked their British interlocutors for ideas on Scottish autonomy. After considering the issue of autonomy for ten years, Bastagli asked, these are the questions the GOM is asking now? Bastagli said the political parties were unlikely to produce anything of substance on the issue. Morocco needed to give something credible to the Security Council, but its credibility was now low. Perhaps, Bastagli said, there has not been enough international pressure on Morocco to drive home the importance of delivering a serious autonomy plan. Ambassador agreed that Morocco seemed not to be approaching the issue seriously.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador thanked Bastagli for his presentation on MINURSO activities and said the US appreciated the diplomacy MINURSO had undertaken to defuse tensions during the SADR anniversary celebrations in Tifariti in late February, and for MINURSO support for the many official US visits to the Sahara. Bastagli said MINURSO appreciated the keen interest demonstrated in MINURSO and the Western Sahara by the US embassy, and the support given to its work.

UN Human Rights Visit Aborted -- Again  
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¶13. (C) On the way out, Polcouns asked Bastagli for an update on the visit of the UN Human Rights Commission, anticipated to visit Laayoune in late March. Bastagli said once again the visit had been aborted by the Moroccans, who were adamant that the UN delegation visit Algiers and Tindouf prior to coming to Morocco, and as the proposed itinerary had not been satisfactory to Morocco, the Moroccans had put the visit off.

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Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley